

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
NORTH ADAMS**

**INFORMANT: WALTER D. WOOD**

**INTERVIEWER: ROBERT GABRIELSKY**

**DATE: MARCH 7, 1989**

**PLACE: WESTERN GATEWAY HERITAGE STATE PARK, NORTH ADAMS, MA.**

**R = ROBERT**

**W = WALTER**

**SG-NA-T051**

R: Okay. You've already been interviewed once so that a number of things that I say you may have talked about. And if you recollect that you've talked about something you can either skip it, or say that. We do have to do some sort of formal preliminaries like who you are and that sort of thing. Uh, but other things the interview (--) I may go in, I may start the way your previous interview started, but I would want to go into further detail with. So that's the way we'll approach it. [W: Umhm]

R: Um, where were you born?

W: Here in North Adams.

R: When?

W: February, 1928.

R: Uh, where were your grandparents from?

W: Grandparents uh, originally my father's mother and father were from Plymouth, Mass. And my father had moved up here in about 1922, or 23. Somewhere around there.

R: Uh, do you have a recollection of your grandparents? Do you remember them?

W: Well my grandparents on my mother's side brought me up. [R: Uh huh] My father died when I was one year old and my mother died when I was a year and a half old. So my grandparents on my mother's side raised me. My grandfather was from North Adams originally, as far as I know. I believe he was born here. And as was my grandmother was born in

[Hoosick?] Falls, New York.

R: What did your grandparents do for a living?

W: My grandfather worked at the Arnold Print Works.

R: At, in what capacity?

W: He was like a second line supervisor in the warehousing and the shipping operation.

R: So on Marshall Street?

W: At Marshall Street. He worked there for oh, I guess thirty-five years or so. [R: Umhm] Prior to that he'd been a butcher in a butcher shop.

R: Do you remember any stories that your grandparents told you about their youth?

W: Not too much really other than that uh (--) You know all I can remember when I was younger was that my grandfather worked many long hours.

R: A lot in long hours.

W: Oh yeah. Six days a week. And as a matter of fact he used to go at night, a couple of nights a week and on Saturdays, part-time he went back to his former type of work, a butcher, helping in a local market. [R: Uh huh] In those days you know, a lot of the meat was hand-cut. [R: Right] So there were a number of butchers in each meat market, you know? So to supplement the family income he went there and worked oh, probably twelve or fifteen hours a week in addition to his fifty, or fifty-two hour week in the Print Works.

R: Um, what are your own earliest memories? What are those?

W: Well we lived fairly close to the Arnold Print Works.

R: Uh huh, what street?

W: On [Beasy?] Street. And I remember you know, the large number of people who worked at the Print Works. I guess there must have been fifteen hundred, or a thousand. Seemed as though everybody in the neighborhood (--)

R: You were watching them coming down the, coming down the road?

W: Yeah, worked at the Print Works, you know. And as I got a little older, I know when the fellows got old enough to go to work it seems as though they all went to work at the Print Works. And I use to carry lunches. In those days you know, you carried a hot lunch for the workers down and left them in the gatehouse.

R: Uh huh, uh huh, for your grandfather?

W: No, and for neighbors. [R: Uh huh] And I guess you got the grand sum of something like twenty-five cents a week for doing this. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] Even in the winter when it's freezing [laughs]! And in the summer you had to interrupt (--)

R: Not a lot of days that as a cold as today. [Laughs]

W: In the summer you had to interrupt your playing you know, to carry that lunch, because you didn't dare be late.

R: Uh huh, uh huh. What time was their lunch break?

W: I think at noon time. [R: Uh huh] Yeah.

R: Uh, where did you go to school? You went to Drury?

W: Saint Joseph's [R: Saint Joseph's] Grade School and then Drury High School.

R: Uh huh. And how far did you go in school?

W: High school, a graduate of high school.

R: I seem to recall from the earlier interview that you mentioned that you took some college courses?

W: Uh, yes. When I was connected with the union, the IUE union, they had me take, I took some courses in connection with the union at UMass and at Rutger's.

R: Uh, so you went (--)

W: Meaning labor study courses.

R: So you went down to [W: Rutger's] Rutger's and where you lived, how long were these courses?

W: One, we went for two weeks, each of two years. So it was four weeks in total.

R: When was this?

W: 19, probably about 1970, [R: laughs] 69 or 70.

R: I was secretary/treasurer of an IUE Local in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1970. I knew Herb Levine and all of those (--)

W: Yeah, as a matter of fact the guy who was paying the courses was a guy name Herb Levine.

R: Herb Levine. I was very, I knew him very very well.

W: [Unclear] Yeah, excellent. Excellent consultant.

R: And we use to (--) When we would have (--) When our Local, we were a [few words unclear]. [W: Oh yeah, yeah] And when we would have big meetings for like contract ratification, [W: yeah] we would use the labor center as the, that's where we [few words unclear].

W: Well we had IUE people there and I think there was some IBEW [R: uh huh] and uh, (--)

R: They even had, they had summer schools then.

W: Communication workers had some people there. [R: Gloria John (--)] They'd be about probably seventy-five to a hundred people.

R: Gloria Johnson I think was the education director of the IUE.

W: Yeah, she was the education director, that's right. Oh yeah, I know all of this.

R: [Chuckles] Um, okay. Now that was curious to me you sort of mentioned that you had taken courses at Rutgers. And I says, this guy has never left North Adams and I was wondering what the circumstances were. Um, your first job was at the, was at Sprague, is that right?

W: No, I worked (--) When I got out of high school I worked for about a year. Right at the end of World War II, just prior to the end the army engineers had rented a large amount of space [R: Uh huh] over at the Marshall Street Plant. And they had a warehousing facility there.

R: So your worked in Marshall Street for the Army Corp of Engineers?

W: Right, right. And from there I went into the army.

R: Uh huh. [W: Yup] Uh (--)

W: And then when I got out of the army I worked for a very short time for my uncle as a plumber's apprentice. And I didn't care for that at all. And then I went to Sprague's.

R: At what time did you, when did you go to Sprague's?

W: January of 1947.

R: Um, the best evidence I have at this point, it seems that Arnold Print Works shuts down in April of '42, at Marshall Street. And from your testimony on your previous tape apparently by late in the war, what time, when is production starting in Marshall Street for Sprague's?

W: Sprague? I believe about mid 1946 I think they had their first, it was what they called a Western Electric Department. And they made parts for the Western Electric Company, capacitors.

R: And you start working for Sprague in '40, '45?

W: January of '47. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] They had been in there roughly about six months. We were the only department in the whole place. We were the first department.

R: What did you uh, what did you do?

W: Uh, I was a uh, they called a racker in the aging department. Racked up the capacitors on these uh, boards that went into an oven process then for purging and aging and electrical test type set up.

R: Uh huh. Uh huh. Right. Was this an autoclave type? No, it was a dry oven.

W: No, no, no. It was dry. And they were all in cans and everything and they had to be charged.

R: Filtered, filtered capacitors?

W: No, no, they were electrolytic. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] They had to go through this process of heat and electrical injection I guess you'd call it, [R: uh huh, put a charge on it, right?] for sixteen hours or something, or thirty-six hours, depending on the type and what the capacitance was and so on-going, but that's about what it was, you know.

R: So, well, I mean that's important, because that's a very important part of what we're studying here. And if it's not too boring for you, what was the you know, the actual (--) I mean I understand the department that you worked in, but what exactly did you do? I mean, could you sort of describe what your actual work was in this department?

W: Well, it was connecting. There were terminals that you squeezed right, and you attached (--)

R: And these were all sort of little capacitors like that, right?

W: Oh, well they ranged from probably three inches in diameter to four inches long, [R: uh huh] down to three quarters of an inch in diameter to uh (--)

R: Electronic capacitors for electronic parts.

W: A half an inch in length.

R: And you had to put (--)

W: Connect them to the boards, what they call aging boards.

R: With what? With alligator clips?

W: Yeah, they were alligator clips, right. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] And then each board had a series of lights on them that would show you if that capacitor, each capacitor tied into a light on the side and would tell you if it was taking the charge.

R: Was this hectic? Was this hectic work as you [unclear]?

W: Well it was incentive work, racking up, yeah.

R: Uh huh, so you had to (--) So you were charged by piece rate.

W: You had to hustle. Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, and then help, when they were through that process you had to unhook them and put them in the containers.

R: Umhm. Do you, or did you go to church?

W: Yeah, yeah.

R: Yeah. What church?

W: Well I went to St. Joseph's School. [Laughs]

R: St. Joseph's. And you're still an active practicing catholic?

W: Yeah, St. Francis Church which is a part of that parish.

R: Are you, aside from going to mass do you engage in any other activities in church?

W: No, no. [R: No?] Just (--)

R: Are you married?

W: Oh yeah.

R: Yeah. When were you married?

W: Uh, let's see, thirty-five years. 1954, 55?

R: Uh, where is your wife from? Is she from around (--)

W: My wife originally is from Bennington.

R: Uh huh, uh huh. [W: Yeah] How did you meet her?

W: I met her, she was a student nurse in Pittsfield. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] And a friend of mine was going out with another student nurse. So I happen to meet them, they were here one Sunday night I guess before going back. So he asked me if I wanted to take a ride down with him. So [R: uh huh] and that led to a uh [R: okay], oh about a three year period of dating [R: uh huh] until she completed her nurse's training.

R: Uh, when did you first become active in union activity at uh (--)

W: Well probably after I had been employed three or four years I had some interest, not a great deal. A friend of mine had developed quite an interest in union, you know, young fellow, twenty-four, twenty-five years old. And he was constantly after myself and a couple of others that chummed around with him you know, to get involved. And we would occasionally go to a union meeting or that type thing. You know, we really weren't that interested. You know, I mean (--)

R: Just something you'd do once in awhile.

W: Yeah, once in awhile. And mainly at his request, you know?

R: Uh huh. He was more interested than you.

W: Oh yeah, yeah. He was very nice.

R: Who was this? Do you care to mention his name?

W: Uh, a guy name Billy Mahoney.

R: Is he still around?

W: No, he moved to California oh I'd say about twenty years ago.

R: Uh huh.

W: Yeah, yeah. And then uh, I probably really didn't get interested until I'd been there for ten years or so. And then they had, they didn't call them stewards, they used to call them room representatives. [R: Uh huh] And I guess no one else wanted it so they prevailed on me to take it. [Laughs] You know, as in a cases people don't want, you know, they don't want to get involved. So I said, I'll do it, you know. [R: So you were, you (--)] So I became a little more active then, because(--)

R: You were obliged then to go to meetings regularly?

W: You had to go to the meetings, yeah. So I made you know, most of them, not all of them. I still wasn't that deeply involved, you know. [R: Uh huh] So uh, but that, that really got me interested a little more, mainly in what, I guess I'd say I didn't see going on. [R: Uh huh] Not in what I did see going on. It's what I didn't see going on. I didn't see any activity on the union's

part that indicated they were progressive in any way, or there were no training. I thought when I got elected representative they'd be some kind of training, or, but there was nothing. I mean no one even gave me any instructions on what to do, or how to do it, or, there was nothing.

R: Stackpole liked to [few words unclear]. He handled everything himself, or (--)

W: Uh, I think he was at that time, I believe he was chairman of the grievance committee.

R: Uh huh. I can find out from [Gliss's?] dissertation. I mean he, Stackpole basically said that he was, he ran the show until you took over.

W: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah, he was chairman of the grievance committee for uh, oh probably fifteen years I take a guess. [R: Yeah, yeah] At least, about that long, somewhere around there. [R: Uh huh] Yeah, up till probably 1961, or '62 I guess. Then I think some one else took over the chairmanship. Charlie Bass perhaps?

R: I think Stack (--) I thought, my rec (--)

W: [Comment unclear]

R: My reading was that he was in there until he retired. He says, you came in right after he retired, because he had problems with his throat, his voice in the mid-late sixties.

W: Well, well I finally got elected president of the Inter (--) Of the Independent Union.

R: You had run several times? Or, you did say finally.

W: Uh, I think I had run for the grievance committee a couple of times back maybe in the mid-fifty, or early fifties. Fifty-five maybe, around there.

R: Uh huh. I can probably find this.

W: Yeah, around fifty-five. And then I think maybe I ran again about sixty-one, or so. [R: Uh huh] Because at that time there was a lot of uneasiness. The company had finally put in a pension plan. They gave the people fifty cents for each year of service, you know. [Both laugh] So we had, you know, we had people who were retiring with twenty-five years of service they were getting a pension of \$12.50 a month. [R: Right] And those of us who could count a little bit thought you know, it was somewhat of an insult [R: uh huh] to people, because other pension plans were probably up around five or six dollars, [R: uh huh] you know, for a year of service per month. [R: Right, right, right] And then we finally, after I believe about five years, we got an increase up to one dollar, but only for future credits. They didn't even get the fifty cents for the back credits, you know, in the increase. [R: Uh huh] And that pretty much got me and a number of other people really mad. And that's when a group of us got together and said you know, we, we've got to do something [chuckles] here, because you know, time is marching on and we were all you know, not old but getting older. [R: Umhm] Now we all had uh, uh, probably fifteen years or so of service you know, and our interest now were changing, you know.



R: So you, that was your primary concern? A sort of agitation of a question of a decent pension plan.

W: [Unclear]

R: It was not around the working conditions, or things like that?

W: No, I don't tend to say the working conditions were that bad, other than there was a time study system that was uh, somewhat of a mistreat. You know, it was a time study watch time and effort factor that determined you know, the number of pieces and the effort factor. That's always in a debate. I don't care who's doing the study, [R: right] but that's always going to be a bone of contention is to how they rate you for your effort. [R: Right, right] Uh, but it was the grievance committee's inaction I guess I'd have to call it, in that you called them with a problem and sometimes they'd come up to service you and other times they wouldn't. You know, and the poor guy that was the room representative, the worker would be [unclear] at him and with no training and no guide books, or no instructions, the poor room rep didn't really know what to do. You know, because you didn't have any training on how to handle anything. You know, I mean you could go and talk to the foreman, [R: Umhm] but he he hard nosed you that was it. You didn't know how to proceed, you know. [R: Uh huh] And yet you'd call these guys, and then when they did come they always came two together. Never one, always two would come. And in many cases (--) After you got to know the system, you see the way it worked, if you weren't satisfied with the answer they gave you, you'd call two different guys.

R: Oh, they were always, there were always a couple of other guys. [Laughs]

W: And then probably got a different answer. So once you learned how (--) [Laughs]

R: What was, what was Stackpole's role in this arrangement?

W: He at that point didn't get too involved in going out and answer a grievance. He was more like, I guess they would go to him. If they didn't have the answer, they'd go to him and he'd perhaps try to direct them, you know. But some of the guys we had, of the six grievance committee men some of them as far as I'm concerned you know, they couldn't have been directed in any direction. And that was another part of the problem. There were I think two or three of them that at that point Sprague had four plants operating. Beaver Street, Union Street, Marshall Street and Brown Street. So there were many times you couldn't find two or three of these guys, because they were at the local establishments you know? [Laughs] And people would be waiting for service, you know, and you couldn't find the (--)

R: They'd get weight-layed going from one plant to another.

W: Yeah, oh sure. [Florini's], or [Beloin's] Tavern. So finally, like I say, I got elected president I believe it was June of 1965. [R: Yup] At that point Bill Stackpole was still on the grievance committee, but he was having some bad problems with his throat and then lost his ability to speak, uh, almost completely. And I guess he was under doctor's orders not to use his vocal

cords, you know. He was [few words unclear] And he was you know, really couldn't do much. And uh, at that point the ones that were left on the committee you know, well I say kind of made fools of themselves. [R: Umhm] Because when I became president, before they sort of restrained the president from doing anything. If you went to a monthly meeting and a question was asked, now the president is running the meeting, they wouldn't let him answer any questions. One of the grievance committee would jump up and tell the president to sit down. Well when I became president you know, the people who were involved here said look, you know, don't let them push you around, you know. If you feel you've got the answer, give it to us and give it to the people. So at that point when the first time this issue came up and I started to answer, one of them jumped up and said sit down, I'll answer the question! I said no, you sit down, I'll answer the question! I'm the president and the question was asked of me. It wasn't asked of the grievance committee. This has nothing to do with a grievance. As far as I'm concerned your responsibility is to handle the grievances. My responsibility is to run the organization and that's what this question pertains to, something within the organization. You sit down, I'm declaring you out of order! Well of course this caused great (--) [Laughing] This is the first time these guys have been challenged.

R: How big a meetings were these?

W: Oh at that time we were probably going a hundred and fifty people. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] And the members accepted this. There was no disagreements from the members on the floor.

R: So you were very support, you were supported?

W: Yeah.

R: It strikes me that Stackpole, as head of the grievance committee, if he was you know, the way you're describing it, before you came in the president was kind of a figure head.

W: That's all.

R: And uh, he, but Stackpole must have been a quite powerful figure then?

W: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Well he's an intelligent man. [R: Yeah, yeah] Bill is an intelligent man. I never had any great problems with Bill Stackpole. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] Uh, you know, I can't say that I think he did a great job. You know, I think he could have done more to educate the officers and representatives and the organizational structure as such. Uh, why they didn't do it, I don't know. Some of the people on the grievance committee I don't think no matter what you had for an educational program it would have helped. They just (--)

R: So you have a group of people that you were around, or that were around you that were [W: Oh, quite a number] looking for some kind of reform then.

W: Quite a number. And they were long service employees. They weren't young turks that just joined the club you know. They were people with uh, like myself, anywhere from ten to twenty-five years of service.

R: Were these people then that had positions in the union that were (--)

W: Some of them had over the years been representatives [R: uh huh] and saw the same thing that I had seen, you know? [R: Yeah] I mean we were aware of other unions in the area like Pittsfield, or GE where they had stewards training classes. They had speakers come in to talk about different you know, be it social security, or whatever the issue. [R: Right] Labor law, whatever. In all the years I never remember having one person come in to talk to the membership [R: Uh huh] on anything, or the representatives of the people. There was never any attempt made for an educational training program.

R: And uh, you, what (--). How does this evolve towards the IUE? What's the process?

W: All right. Well then they uh, we started in negotiations I guess in the Fall. Seems to me it was perhaps about September. I had been president for maybe four or five months and negotiations started. Well first came the problem of that I would not be allowed to go into negotiations.

R: Because you were president? [W: I was president] Had nothing, right. You had nothing to do with the (--)

W: So I challenged them and then said show me in the constitution where it said you guys are the negotiating committee (--)

R: You mean the grievance committee was wanted to prevent you from going? It wasn't the company?

W: Yeah, oh yeah, not the company. No, not the company. No. [R: Uh huh] Grievance committee said you know, you don't come in. Well finally I said well I'm going to go to the labor board and find out you know, why I don't go in. [R: Right] You know, who gave you people the power. And then I went to the membership and told them. So then the grievance committee said, well you can come in, but you can't speak. Oh I said again, you know, who gives you this power to make this rule? I'm going to appeal to the membership. By that time we had activated what we called a representative council. Like the stewards council, right? And we had elected a chairman. And he said that he wanted to also attend in negotiations as representative of the representatives. [R: Umhm] So he could report back to them, to his representatives council meeting. Well he said you can't come in either. So we went to a membership meeting. We got it on the agenda. We brought it up and the membership backed us. The only ones that voted no was the grievance committee.

R: This is in '64?

W: '65.

R: In those days you had one year agreements?

W: Was it '65 or '66? It was the year I got elected. [R: Uh huh]

R: It sounds like, I think that was '66.

W: I think it was '66. Well anyway we brought it to the membership and they were [R: And those, you usually had one (--)] amazed that over the years none of them, including myself, or other people never knew. I guess once in awhile they used to let the president go in, but he couldn't speak and the membership was amazed at this. You know, they said, well. None of the prior presidents had ever brought this to the memberships attention.

R: Was this grievance committee, was it kind of a closed club?

W: Oh yeah, sure.

R: I mean they all constantly got re-elected?

W: They spent half their day flipping nickels in the hallway. [R: Uh huh] You know, or closest to the wall. [R: Yeah] You know, you'd have people with a problem. We'd be calling and they'd be down either in the cafeteria, or they'd be up in the hallway flipping nickels, or pennies against the wall.

R: Were these, were these guys elected regularly?

W: Oh well, yeah. They, I think they had three year terms. So each year you had two guys running, you know. [R: Uh huh, like the senate] [Both laughing] You were really running against, you were running against six, you know, but I mean it. The structure was very nicely (--) ) Whoever uh, developed the structure you know, did a hell of a job.

R: Uh huh. Well that's actually uh, it's not something that I have been able to find out yet, but is an interesting thought as you put, that the fact that it was an independent union [unclear] (--)

W: Yeah. So anyway we prevailed in our fight to get into the negotiations. [R: Uh huh] When we did make our first appearance the company challenged our presence. And I told the company to go to hell! That the union membership had the right to decide who is on their negotiating committee, not the company. And they said, well. And I said, the membership had instructed us to attend these negotiation sessions. He said well, you can attend, but neither one of you will be allowed to speak. So again I said, woe, you know? Mr. Company, you don't tell this committee who can speak and who can't. If the people send us here as their representatives, if we want to speak we're going to speak and you just try to stop us from speaking, because I know where to go. [Chuckles] So that ended that. They must have went and talked to their legal council.

R: Were you retaining a lawyer or anything at this time?

W: Not right then. No, we didn't have a lawyer. We never (--)

R: Well you knew enough to go to the labor board.

W: Oh yeah, well I mean anybody who has read any books, or [R: yeah] you know, knew that much.

R: So you had used (--)

W: Had a right to appeal somewhere.

R: Yeah, umhm, umhm. Um, so anyways, so you've made this challenge and you're able to get into negotiations.

W: Right, okay. In the background during this time, there was a group that I guess had worked with the IUE before. They had made a couple of other attempts to gain bargaining representation oh in the early, in the fifties, maybe the mid-fifty, after the IUE was formed in the mid-fifties I think. Around there. Uh, (--)

R: Forty-nine I think.

W: Somewhere in there. Yeah, when they kicked, they slipped from the UE. [R: Yeah, when they took the UE out] Yeah. And then they tried uh (--) Well maybe it was uh, forty-nine, or fifty, around there. And then they made another attempt uh, maybe fifty-nine, or 1960. Seems to me they made two drives there, [R: Umhm] but didn't have much success. There was still (--)

R: But there were people around who had been involved in this?

W: A number of people who had been involved in those efforts you know, were still there. [R: Uh huh] Uh, they started after we'd been in negotiations for oh, maybe a month or so. You've got to remember now, each time we're having the meeting I was going back to the membership. Initially when the committee said I couldn't go to negotiations I went back to (--)

R: Sunshine law, telling you what was going on.

W: Right. Now when we went into the meeting and the company says we couldn't speak we then went back to the membership to let them know what was going on. The membership said, well what did the grievance committee say? Well I said, they didn't say anything. They just sat there. Not one word came out. You know, I'm looking around for support, you know. Come on boys you know, I'm on your team, you know. Nothing. So it was the chairman of the representatives and myself who really told the company, hey look, you know. You may have dictated terms here, but not to us. This, you know, we're telling you we know what our rights are and what our membership say are. If they want to send us here to speak for them, that's their right.

R: So there's this group of people who are around you [W: yeah, yeah] who are sort of trying to get and sort of reform the existing organization, but there's also another group of people who would like to affiliate with the IU, right?

W: Right. So we were in negotiation (--)

R: Who is leading that up? Who are the individuals?

W: Oh, I don't know. That was quite a number of people.

R: You can't remember?

W: It was probably twenty-five, thirty-five people. Quite a group. We were in negotiations and the next thing I know we were pretty near completed the negotiations. And we had a caucus in the grievance committee that still pretty much is trying to run the whole thing, amongst themselves said, we won't take less than, oh, I forget what the number was, you know, three and a half percent, whatever. They said a number, we won't take less than that. So the company had gone out to caucus. And the company came back and talked and they said, well we'll offer you, it was like 2 1/2 percent. So all of a sudden three or four of these pre-planned committees said, oh, they says oh. So I said, woe, hold it, wait a minute here. Company we want to have a caucus. So when the company left they said, well what are you people doing? You just voted in here not ten minutes ago that you wouldn't except less than, whatever the number is you all agreed. And you all agreed, right? Well yeah. Well I said, now the company come in and offered you just peanuts over what, where they had been before. And you're all (--) You know, I said, as far as I'm concerned this meeting is over and I'm going back to report to the membership what is taking place here. And the guy that was the chairman of the representatives said hey, this smells. At about that same time that day I think the company came in and said, we just got a notice that a petition has been filed, because the IUE had been, sign up cards, you know?

R: Umhm. So there had been people bleeding it dry.

W: Yeah. Well that pretty much convinced me that what I was sitting in on you know, I really didn't want to be a part of. And the guy that was chairman of the representatives got the same feeling. That you know, what are we doing here? What kind of leadership have we got if they amongst themselves, and they didn't let us even vote on this, what would be the minimum acceptable amount. And then when the company came in they backed right off, you know? And now that I think about it you know, I'm sure if they ever said, hey look you know, either this, or what we would have got, you know, there wasn't that much difference. [R: Yeah] What was one percent in them days? It wasn't that much. So from that point on I had, didn't even attempt to try anymore reform with that group. You know, you just went and went with the membership, because immediately the membership really started snowballing down hill toward the IUE. You know, I could see it in the people that I met each day told me. They said, hey, you know, you've got to change. So, I said hey, I guess I can't blame you. From what I've seen you know, in these five or six months, you know.

R: So that you moved then to re-affiliate? To affiliate.

W: Uh, there was a vote for affiliation, which the independent union agreed to. [R: Uh huh] That was held at the local fire station. [R: Uh huh] And each group had equal participation in the tellers and the counters and such. And the IUE won that. Well then the independent union

said, no, they wouldn't affiliate. So then by then there was a petition filed for a board election, you know? [R: Umhm] And that was held I guess. So, but in the meantime then the IAM, which it had a bargaining unit in there for the machinists, they jumped in.

R: So everybody was fighting for their survival.

W: And they tried, they filed a petition, because now all they needed was I don't know, five percent?

R: Right.

W: A small number. [R: Right] The IUE had to have a majority to get a petition, [R: right] or thirty percent?

R: Thirty, you need thirty percent. [W: Thirty percent, whatever, yes] The second union only needs five percent.

W: Yeah, very small number. But for twenty years they had sat there as an international union and done nothing to help you know, the hourly paid production workers, or the office workers. And now all of a sudden they file petitions on both the production unit and the office unit. Well that got quite a few people made too, because they looked at it as though, well the IAM got their's all of these years, because they had been moving along fairly well. And their wages were comparable to GE machinists, you know? [R: Umhm] And they were all skilled trade guys so they had to be paid. But you know, they were getting theirs and the way we looked at it they didn't care about anybody else. [R: Yeah, yeah] But now I guess because they maybe felt they were going to have to share the pie or something, you know, well they were going to control, you know, what side of the pie got cut first. [Laughs] But they uh, then there was the run-off election, you know?

R: Uh huh. Was, rather the same time then the um, that the office workers were moved, were affiliated (--)

W: The IUE filed on them too.

R: But yeah, but was it that, didn't they also that the [unclear] of professional and technical employees?

W: I think they had a vote from (--) Yeah, they uh, got involved also. So on their ballot they had the IUE, IFPTE, machinists and the independent office workers. I think they had four.

R: Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh. And they lost once I think and then came in later after [DE?] came in.

W: Seems that, well then they, I think they had to have a run-off. They did because there was four units. Seems to me they had a run-off and then the top two fought it out. And it was between the professional and technical workers and the IUE. [R: Right, right] And professional

and technical won by not many, maybe ten or twelve votes. It was fairly close.

R: Um, I'm going to sort of change tempo here a little bit, but there are different aspects of this I want to get. I've interviewed a lot of people who have been active in unions in, at Sprague at different periods, during different time periods. And the question that I'm always interested in where ever people are working is, what do you do off the job? What do you like to do when you're not working?

W: What did I do?

R: Yeah, what, yeah.

W: Well one thing I did, we had six kids after we got married.

R: Uh, so you were busy taking care of the house and stuff.

W: And then I was affiliated with drum and bugle corps. When I was a youngster we use to have what they call The Sons of the American Legion. Up until the time I went to work. And of course at that time also it was during World War II. So a lot of our older fellows had gone in the service, so became inactive. Uh, when I came out, again, we had a senior drum and bugle corp now in North Adams and Adams.

R: You play the drum or the bugle?

W: Both. [R: Yeah] And that lasted three or four years.

R: Which did you prefer?

W: Either, wherever I was needed. And then uh, that disbanded after three or four years. Our director moved out of town and we really couldn't get anyone that had the knowledge around here you know, to handle it. And then in 1956 we formed a unit with Pittsfield. And we had that for two years. We then merged with a unit from [Cohos?], New York. And because of the two states became known as the interstatesmen. And I was the managing director of that group. No one else wanted the job. So I got that job.

R: Did you do drum majoring or?

W: No. No, no, I just organized it. First couple of years I played and managed the business. [R: Uh huh] And then we were quite successful. As a matter of fact we were rated in the next ten years in the top five in the United States.

R: So did you go to a lot of parades and stuff all over these states?

W: There were these competitions all over from Toronto, Canada, all the way to Baltimore, Pittsburg. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] All over the east. Uh, and I stayed with them until I got involved with the union. [R: Uh huh] Now at that time between the union duties and I guess



then we had five children, my wife was only able to work part-time, because I was tied up with the union and the drum corp. So I had to make a decision. So I left the drum corp. A couple of reasons. A lot of the fellows that had started with me ten years before had now phased out because of their age and such. And there was quite a new group that really didn't associate with you know, they were good kids, but really it wasn't the same and it changed, you know. And plus like I say, now I had to stay home. My wife had to work a few more hours.

R: When you became involved, heavily involved in union activity what proportion of your workday was involved with union activity? Was it a hundred percent? [W: No] fifty percent? [W: No] Twenty-five percent? [W: No]

W: [Unclear] the present structure. I probably, if I uh, off of the job I don't think I spent over six hours a week.

R: How about on the job? I mean how much percentage of your actual workday was involved.?

W: Oh, I would get occasional phone calls. I'd probably get a phone call once an hour from a chief steward, or a steward looking for some assistance.

R: But most of the time you were doing production work?

W: Uh, yeah. For awhile I was in production. Then I went into the maintenance department and I worked in the maintenance stockroom, which was the type of a job that gave me a little bit of freedom. There were five or six of us there. As a matter of fact the vice president also worked there in the maintenance stockroom for four or five years. And then he left and moved to California, because his daughter had a bad sinus condition or something. He had to move to the dry desert type. So I did have, the type of job it was receiving and issuing stock, you know, as long as it got done and some things didn't have to be done right now, you know. You could get the stuff off the truck and then put it away, whatever. [R: Right, right] So I could take a phone call inbetween. [R: Uh huh, uh huh] But I had a strong belief from our prior experiences with the independent union and immediately we set up training programs for stewards and officers with Herbie Freedman from the University of Mass. [R: Uh huh] And uh, oh a couple of his associates came up. And we ran a series of classes. Each year for probably five or six years we would run, I think there were twelve, twelve week training periods. And they'd come up each week and run these training periods, you know?

R: Where would these be held?

W: We had opened an office. [R: Uh huh] We had rented an old dilapidated area in a building on Main Street. Made sure it had an elevator so in the event we had any handicap people, it was on the second floor, it would be accessible for them. And we got a number of guys that volunteered and we did about 98% of the work ourselves, including all of the carpentry. But the only thing we had done is someone come in and layed the rugs for us, you know, the furniture store. We had a very nice office and the people were quite proud. Because all of the years of the independent union they never had an office. [R: Uh huh, yeah] You know, with twenty-five hundred members? [R: Right] I mean where were the records kept and where (--)

R: I have them now. [Laughs]

W: So we had an office and everything was filed.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO BEGINS

R: [Comment begins in mid-sentence] Negotiating contracts. Did the union have a social life? Did it do other things? [Comment unclear]

W: Oh yeah. We immediately started. We had a Christmas Party with solicited merchants and had nice prizes. We had a dance like in June, the end of the meeting, because we wouldn't meet in July and August, you know, because of vacations and summer. You know, you weren't going to draw many people anyway. But we'd have a nice social program in June. Nice buffet and a band and everything. And then we got our people involved in community things like the daycare center. We were one of the early supporters of that. And a number of our members we got them involved in hooking up, like the electrician, the alarm systems and helping out the daycare center. We got people involved city committees. We got them active in the democratic city committee.

R: Yeah. As a result of you union activity, as a direct consequence of that, did that motivate you to, you personally to become involved in other clubs, organizations, associations, or?

W: Well I got involved in the North Adams Housing Authority. [R: Uh huh] And I was on there for five or six years. As a matter of fact we advocated that the housing authority should have a labor representative. [R: Uh huh] You know, so we could speak for the working people as such. Make sure they got a fair shot at a vacant apartment, you know.

R: Did you while you were president, or in the leadership of the local, did the local, was the local involved in any way in cooperating with other locals, particularly in the region?

W: Well we assisted, there was an organizing effort at Wall Streeter Shoe Company [R: uh huh, uh huh] and we let those people on their committee use our facilities and talked with them only to the extent when they requested us. You know, I told our officers you know, don't inject yourself into their business, but if they ask for your assistance, you know, give it to them, but don't force yourself on them. Also we assisted when the general cable local was being organized, [R: umhm, umhm] down in Hodge's Crossroad. Again, we assisted them in furnishing office space, telephone and some printing for them. And assistance and advice one requested.

R: Um, perhaps you may feel that you already answered this, but then again maybe not. Um, to (--) This is a charge that comes up all the time, that I hear all the time, and I'll repeat it to you and see what you think. The notion that the ICW was a company union, is that, how do you react to that?

W: I have nothing to prove that, but indications were that if we as members knew these guys were over drinking in the local saloons during working hours then certainly someone from management, at that time the company had four thousand local employees, and they had probably what, three hundred management level people? [R: somebody probably would be walking by] Some of them must have seen these guys in these places and nothing was done, but if the rank and file worker went over there and camped on a stool for two hours I'm sure he would have been unemployed. [R: Right, right] You know, yet nothing went on and they were allowed to stand in the open hallways by the hour and flip nickels against the wall. Well any other worker that did that I think would have soon been you know, put on the gallows, or discharged, or something would have happened. But this went on day after day, month after month. And everybody use to say you know, jee, you know, go down the grievance committee [unclear]. [Both Laugh]

R: Right, right. At some point you get offered a job in personnel, in management? What are the circumstances to that?

W: All right. I remained as president of the IUE for about I guess it was nine years, nine or ten years. [R: Uh huh] Uh, now a lot of the original people were retiring. A lot of the officers had remained in for that same period of time. We had some new younger people coming in who for whatever, that had some different ideas. I guess probably as we had had years earlier, you know, had their own ideas.

R: Ray Bass said he found a letter in his files that he had written to you and he says you know, everything I accused him of I'm guilty of. [Laughs]

W: Probably. But you know, I guess what do you call it, burn-out, or after awhile you just throw your hands out and say, hey, you know. And at that point you know, I had been with the drum corp for ten years, two nights a week, weekends away. My kids were growing up. Now with the union (--)

R: So you had a very active social life, right.

W: Yeah, with the union it'd been about ten years. My kids have grown up. Now I had a kid. The next thing I know I had a kid fifteen, sixteen years old and another one thirteen, and one eleven. And my two boys, the two oldest boys, let's see, one was fourteen and one was thirteen. And they had played little league baseball and Babe Ruth league baseball. I had never been able to go see them play a game. [R: Uh huh] I was busy every night, because I believed in trying to do my job at work [R: right] and the union business, which I got paid a hundred dollars a month for, was to be done where ever possible after work and on weekends. And this was all logged. And I don't know if the union still got the logues, but it was right in there. You know, 6:30 P.M

till 9:30. Seven till 10:30. Saturday, every Saturday morning myself and the vice president, and the secretary, treasurer were there from perhaps 8:30 till one in the afternoon. Sundays we'd be there from 9:30 in the morning till 12:30. So we did an awful lot of our work at the union office.

R: Uh huh, uh huh. So you had enough.

W: You know, and finally you know, when all the stuff started (--) You know, and then there was a question of you know, over the years our membership was declining. The company had moved operations out of the city. And at one point we had a large number of people on lay-off status and had been out quite a while. And our treasury after the strike had built up pretty good. We had maybe one hundred thousand dollars. And we said, you know, jeeze that's too bad. Well let's see, let's give these people a turkey for Christmas. At least we'll know they got a turkey dinner. And somebody said well, why, if we do it for them then the members that are working (--) So we said well, we, [R: do it for everybody] we'll give everybody. Cause a lot of other people had been out and back in to work and shut downs for a week or two. Business was bad. You know, there was a period of time there when it was really bad. So the next year the situation wasn't quite the same, but still there had been lay-offs and that. So we said well, we'll give them a turkey again. Now come the next year. Everybody had been back to work. They were working overtime and everything and we had now seen the effect on our treasury. Plus the membership was still declining. So now we said, well look, you know, we're down maybe \$70,000. We can't keep doing this. If we do you know, we're spending more than we're taking in now. So we've got to knock off this \$10,000 thing a year for the turkeys. So we posted it on all of the boards. We said we're going to have the meeting, we're going to take a vote on the discontinuance of awarding the turkeys. Membership came to the meeting. We explain it, told them what was happening. The people there, there was a vote probably about ten to one. Fine, they understood. The next thing I know I get a petition in the mail signed by a whole bunch of people who weren't at the meeting, wanted a revote on the damn turkeys. So you know, that, I said at that point, I said that's it for me. Once the foolishness starts, you know, this is just foolish. If they wanted that damn turkey, why didn't they come to the meeting and stand up there and speak and listen to the reasons why we couldn't do it anymore.

R: This was what, what year was this? In '73, '74?

W: Oh no, no, no, no. '76 maybe? [R: Uh huh] About '76. '75, '76, yeah. Because it was about nine or ten years I had been there, you know?

R: So.

W: So with that I wanted to quit right away. I said you know, hey, when they start acting foolish like this, you know, I'm working too hard at it and I you know, once this stuff starts I says, when you vote on an issue, if the people that aren't here don't agree with what we voted on we're going to get a petition and vote again. And then if we vote some way, then the other ones will have another petition to take another. I said, you know, this is (--) No, no thank you.

R: Then you retired?

W: Well the committee said, well, you know, we're going into negotiations in four or five months and this and that and you know, will you stay until your term runs out and go through negotiations? So I talked about it with my wife and she said, well, you know, why don't you finish out you know, and just don't run, you know. So I didn't run the next time in June and neither did the vice-president, and neither did the secretary/treasurer. And neither did a couple of the chief stewards, because they had all seen this.

R: So a whole new regime came in.

W: And they said, they said hey, you know, once this stuff you know, once this kind of action starts we, you know.

R: And how long was it then when you [rest of statement unclear]?

W: All right. So then I was out uh, after, that was I think '76. About 1978 the company decided (--) I guess somebody left. No, they hadn't had an Assistant Human Resource Manager for awhile. They had had it earlier. When the IUE first got in they had hired three or four assistant managers you know, for labor relations. And then gradually it went down. So in '78 the manager, who had been president previously of the Independent Office Workers Union, a guy name Bob Diodati, [R: Bob Diodati, yeah, I talked to him] I saw him in the cafeteria. And he told me, he said hey, we're going to be posting a job you know, for an assistant for me. Why don't you bid her? I said, no. I said look, you know, I've only been out of the union about two years. And I said people are not going to say that I was bought out, no way! No way! I wouldn't touch that with a ten foot pole, you know?

So they hired a, I guess they hired a girl. Some young lady from Ohio, or somewhere. And she lasted maybe a year. And then she left and they hired a young fellow, local guy, who had been I don't know, in accounting or something over there, who wanted to try his hand at labor, you know? So he worked for maybe a year and a half or two. And then he left. Oh, and when the girl left again Diodati said to me, jeeze that jobs opened again, you know? Why don't you? I said, no, no, no. I said, leave me alone. You know, I'm living a nice happy life. I'm over in the maintenance stockroom and I says we've got it running good. And I got three or four guys working with me. And you know, I'm happy, leave me alone! I don't want anymore headaches. [Laughs] Because it was pleasant now, after (--) As a matter of fact I got involved and younger boys were now playing, two younger ones were now playing little league baseball. So I took them up you know, to practice, you know. And I'm sitting watching them practice, really enjoying this, because like I say, the older two I never saw them play. In all of those years they played I never saw them play one game. I was always busy, you know? Or if they were playing and my wife was working one of her two or three nights she used to work like 7-11, you know, well I had to stay home and babysit the smaller ones. [R: Right] You know, so I (--)

So now here I am. So the guy that was coaching come over. He said, I understand you use to play ball, he said. A little bit. I said, I was no Lou Garrig, or Babe Ruth. He said jeeze, I need a hand. He says you know, the kids, you know. How about helping me? I said, I don't know. I said, jeeze I said, I (--) Ah, he said, get yourself a little exercise. He says, you come up with the kids anyway. You bring them up. He says, you know, come back up to pick them up. Why don't you stay an hour, hour and a half. I said, uh. I said, well until you get somebody else I help you. As a matter of fact I stuck with it for four years.

And then finally you know, the second guy that Diodati hired, he left. Uh, I think he (--) Oh he took the job at Sprague's in Florida. So again he called me on the phone and he says, jeese. He says look, he says you know, I just went through two people, he says, training them, trying to train them. He says, I'm spinning my wheels. He says, you know, I've got two people that have no experience whatsoever. They didn't know the first things about it. He said, I just about get them so you know, I can tell them you know, room such and such, or go see this guy and they leave. Why don't you sign a bid for this job? Send in your letter of application. I said, I don't want to. He says, jeese, come on. He says, jeese I really want you. So I said, uh. So I talked about it with my wife. I said I don't know whether I want that or not. I don't know. I said, listen to all that stuff again. I said, you know, my head is just you know. [Laughs] I don't know if you ever been affiliated, or active in the union, but after awhile you know, you get lumps on you head. [Laughing] You say jeese, why did I ever get in the middle of this, you know. So I said, uh, so I said all right. So I [unclear]. So I'll submit an application I said, but I'm not you know, I'm not worry about whether I get it or not.

So they called me over for an interview. So I talked with them. And about a few days later he called me. He said, now he said, I want you to go out and see the boss of the outfit, you know. Of course I knew him too from you know, labor relations. So I went out and talked with him. And a couple of days later they called me and they said, come on back over we want to talk to you. So they said, well, we've interviewed a number of people and you're, as far as we're concerned you're the head of the class. They said, you know the contract, you know the people. You know, you know, what's right and what's wrong. And you've always been fair in your dealings with the company, you know. They said, you know, we were a little afraid there ten years ago, or twelve years ago what might happen, but hey, no complaints. You know, you've been honest and up front with us. So if you want the job it's yours. I said well, I'll tell you the one thing we haven't talked about. And they said, what's that? I said, money!

R: Salary. [Both laugh]

W: Don't just give me a job. How much does this thing pay, you know? Just kidding with them, you know? So we talked about that. So I took it and I've enjoyed it.

R: How did that feel? I mean, you talked about you know, sort of feeling conflict about not wanting to get busy again. Didn't you feel any conflict of principle or anything like that, going from one side to another?

W: Not really. Not really. Because I'd always felt what's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong. [R: Uh huh] And I applied the same principle when I went. And really in human resources although you're being paid by the company, you're in the middle. You know, you're the referee really. And many times I've had to fight harder with management people who try to do something contrary to the contract, or practices that the company said was the way they wanted things done. [R: Umhm] And I've have probably as difficult a time sometimes with management representatives as with union representatives.

R: What do you think about that as an issue? I mean especially at, I think at both levels really I'm interested in this. Both when you were in production and then when you went into management. Um, both, how bosses were and what were like, grievances? Were their

grievances over what the foreman did, or bosses did, or things like that? Were there a lot of grievances that were around? Questions of working conditions, or those kinds of issues?

W: No, really it was mainly grievances of overtime assignments, distribution of work. You know, it was Mary Smith getting all of the so called better work, you know, and the other four people on that same job not getting a fair share. You know, that type of a thing. And uh, and then from management, really what you got there is when a guy tries to advocate the agreement. Tries to, his interpretation. And in many cases you got that from newer supervisors who [R: didn't know the agreement that good] read something and thought, well that's what it meant. [R: Right, right] And once they got that in their head to try to change you, hey, that's not the intent. Cause as you know, contracts, you don't spell out every word. If you did you'd have like the New York telephone directory under your arm. So you know, [R: Right.] what does that language mean? [R: Right, it has to be interpreted, right] It's the intent. [R: Right] What led up to these words? And what do they mean? How are they applied? And if you took two people and sent them in a different room and said, you read this and you read that, and then brought them in and said, now what does that mean? [R: Right] And then brought the second guy in, what does that mean?

R: Um, what about the 1970 strike? What were the circumstances? That was sort of the [unclear] getting in the paper and (--)

W: That was, that was (--) All right, what was happening there was the company at that point had to (--) [Whispers: we've got a few minutes here, about ten minutes] Uh, was trying to increase their productivity, because of competition. Offshore competition was now starting to have its affect. Uh, Japanese, and as far as productivity and pricing on products. The company wanted to change the incentive system and we knew that they had already purchased from what's called [sounds like: Wofack] company, a system called Work Factor. We found out about this quite by accident. And I can tell you now, I don't care if anybody knows it, some dumb manager had a memo, right, explaining why it had been done by the company. And that they had purchased the system and the installation of same by the Wofack Company that was to take place in all of the Sprague Plants. The big problem they saw was North Adams with the union, because none of the other plants had a union. So they could put in any system they want. And the manager just threw this in the waste basket. And one of the janitors happened to be dumping the thing and happen to look at it, and brought it over to me. And he said, do you know? What is this? What's this about? And I said, oh my goodness? [R: That's hot stuff] I know what it's about. So I called the International. I said, oh boy! We're going to have World War III! And so we knew three or four months before they even talked to us about what was coming, you know? So we kind of had a chance to get ready.

Well also in the (--) This was the negotiations for the second contract. The first contract we were unable to get arbitration. We also were unable to get any kind of uh, uh, what do you call it? Union security clause. Union shop, or such.

R: Agency?

W: No, we had it just open membership. [R: Uh huh] So what happened in that first contract, you know, every time some little thing happened we got these resignations. You know, twenty,

thirty resignations. [R: Right, right] The next month if they had a little problem they wanted to join again. So you know, it was (--)

R: A revolving door.

W: For both us and the company. You know, payroll, it was crazy I mean.

R: Cause you had a check off, but an open (--)

W: Yeah, yeah, in and out anytime you wanted, you know.

R: Uh, so you were looking for some kind of maintenance in membership?

W: And they had the Independent Union in the background you see, sniping away of course, you know?

R: Right, right.

W: So here comes the second negotiations. The company is introducing their demand to have the incentive system changed. The union wanted arbitration of course, because we had already had a couple of grievances that should have been able to go to arbitration, but we couldn't. It was state mediation, which is, and that is non-binding. That would be just a recommendation for a settlement of a dispute. So it was worthless really. So you know, in the meantime the officers had changed in the independent union. Bob Diodati has now taken a job with the company as an Industrial Relations Manager and they had elected a new young guy there as president. Also they had (--)

R: Was this Bulger, or is this before Bulger?

W: No, this was a guy named Ronald Durand.

R: All right.

W: And they had assigned (--)

R: Durand went in to personnel too, right?

W: No, no, he got canned about five years later using the company telephone, or something. Long, all kinds of long distance calls. But they had assigned them a new Field Representative. It was his first negotiation. Guy just went on the staff. They were also looking for union security clause of some type. Well what we wanted was like a closed shop, you know, everybody had to join the union.

So we knew we had a battle over work factor. We knew the company wanted it. They had already paid you know, thousands and thousands of dollars for the system. So we knew in the end that if we held out long enough you know, "no" to work factor and they were saying "no" to arbitration. In the meantime we kept getting work factor language that would protect the



incentive workers. And we kept working on improvement for that. We've got to have this, we've got to have that. And the last session we had, as a matter of fact, Bob Diodati said to me, he said, you know, what are we going to need to settle this thing? So all I could find to write on was a napkin at the Williams Inn. So I wrote on a napkin, you know, arbitration, 1% more in the first year, and a couple of other minor things. You know, cause he didn't have any paper and I didn't. I said, "here Bob." I said, "take this, show it to them. You know, if we can get those things I think we can get a contract." [Phone rings] He come back later he says, "woe that's so stupid." So uh, the office unit, yeah, I guess we met on a Saturday and I think the office workers had a meeting with the company on Sunday. Uh, I still feel we could have settled our differences. You know, the company wanted a work factor real bad. They had had that. The office workers met and then they went to a meeting with their membership, at which time they were going to take a strike vote. We had already taken a strike vote maybe ninety days earlier. So we had the strike vote in our pocket, hoping we really wouldn't have to use it, you know?

R: Yeah, you were [unclear].

W: Hoping we really wouldn't have to use it, you know? Because who wants that? [R: Right] That's (--) So they met down at the American Legion. So we had one of our guys stop down there just to try to find out you know, what's happening. Sat out at the bar, pretty soon he called up. He said, "guess what?" "You know the office workers are going to go on strike tomorrow morning." He says, "you're kidding, office workers took a vote to go on strike?" That's you know, somewhat unusual for office workers.

R: Right, sure.

W: They might follow, but very seldom (--) Well I guess they wanted to show they're macho, or whatever, you know. So next morning when I went to go down to work there they were.

R: So you crossed the picket line?

W: In the meantime, yeah, well in the meantime we couldn't (--) Oh, then what happened (--) Well the people stayed out. They wouldn't cross the picket line. Maybe about, of all of the hourly production people I guess fifteen people went in to work.

R: Did you make a recommendation at this point that they work?

W: No, I said it's up to you people. You know, under the law if you feel you're in danger crossing that line, you don't have to do it, but it's up to you. We're not, the union is not telling you to stay out. It's up to you. I said, hopefully this will only be a couple of days. The company will see that hey, this is, everybody means what they're doing here. And you know, they'll start talking.

R: So did IUE people join in line?

W: Oh no no, we couldn't. We couldn't. We couldn't actively picket, because we weren't on strike. [R: Uh huh] You know what I mean? [R: Yeah, yeah] But the IUE, uh, IFPTU,

whatever they were then [unclear] then at that time were picketing. Within a couple of days I believe the Independent Union now filed a petition for an election, [R: Yeah] which meant now we couldn't negotiate anymore. The IUE couldn't negotiate and they're under petition. So here the office workers are picketing, we can't go into work through the picket line, we didn't (--) Well by now everybody, and now when the Independent Union filed that petition that just got the production people all the more wild, you know. They said, "screw them all!" You know, if that's what's happening here, you know? Because a couple of them guys were crossing the picket line going to work and they said, "they want to represent us?" [R: Uh huh] Here these guys are crossing the union's picket line and they got the nerve to file a petition to represent us! [R: Uh huh] You know, you're got to be goofy! So we had to wait about uh, oh I guess about three weeks. And then we had an election. The board quickly arranged the election because of the problem, you know. So we had the election and the IUE won something like thirteen hundred to three hundred, or something. It was, you know, that was a rout. But now we still couldn't go back to work, but now that the IUE, now was the bargaining agent. As soon as we got the certification, then we went on strike. I mean now, because then our people couldn't get any money up till this point. You know, the IUE was getting twelve dollars a week for strike benefits.

R: Right, you couldn't get strike benefits.

W: Right? But we weren't on strike! [R: Right] So the people were now out four weeks and they had not a penny coming in. So now the only thing we could do, the office union was still out there strong and the machinists by now have gone on strike. The IAM.

R: Right. Who was the head of the machinists?

W: At that point?

R: Was that Bass? Charlie Bass?

W: No, no, no. [Comment unclear] Joe Laura, was he the president?

R: Joe Laura, it sounds like it might be. Yeah, it might have been Joe Laura. Is he still around?

W: Yeah, he runs the Camp Light Sporting Goods up here, up on West Main, just above City Hall.

R: I Just asked Charlie Kelley if anybody was around and he said no. I said all right?

W: Yeah, Joe was either the chief steward, or the president. I forget.

R: There's a picture that's in the morgue of the transcript of you and two other union leaders. [Comment unclear]

W: But uh, so now we went on strike and the people were able to get the twelve dollars a week. At least a little something, you know? And the ones that did double picket duty we got them you know, to cover all the plants. We got them a little extra, you know, we got them like eighteen

dollars, because they did double, double shifts, you know? During the night and weekends, you know?

R: Well, I've really appreciated this. I mean there are, I feel like there's a lot more that I could ask you and that, but I don't want to keep you from your other obligations. Um, the one (--) There's sort of a half a dozen questions I still feel a need to ask you about Sprague pulling out of Marshall Street, and about MoCA and things like that.

W: Well I don't know. Sprague leaving, I don't know. That was a decision that was made by I gather new managers, fairly new. We felt they were making a mistake. To my knowledge there has been no consultation of local human resources as to what we saw down the road. You know, relationship and that. It was just, I gather some people that had moved up into somewhat higher management positions just didn't like North Adams. Did not like the fact I guess there were unions here, [R: Uh huh] which they didn't have to deal with in other locations. Somehow they had remained union free. And you know, when these people started visiting North Adams and occasionally we would meet with them and problems were their authority and some other plant had a relationship to an operation in North Adams. Their approach to how things should be done you know, really wouldn't work in North Adams, [R: Umhm] because of the long history of practices and such. [R: Right] You know, they just weren't applicable here. It would have caused a war. [Laughs]

R: So the easiest way to deal with it was just to leave, from their point of view. Right.

W: And then and I think in the end it proved itself. And those people made that decision including John Sprague, all ended up on the outside. [Phone rings] They all ended up on the outside.

R: Um, I have really one more basic question that I'd like to ask you before you leave, which I can ask you off the tape. [Tape shuts off].

TAPE ENDS